

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002729

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/19/2012

TAGS: OREP PREL PGOV SENV ECON NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIAN LEGISLATORS HOST CODEL DASCHLE

REF: ABUJA 2665

**¶1.** (C) SUMMARY: On August 31, CODEL Daschle met Senate President Anyim, Deputy House Speaker Nwuche, and other members of the National Assembly Leadership. Discussions touched on democracy and rule of law in Nigeria, trade relations and expanding Nigeria's economy, natural gas production issues, Executive-Legislative branch disputes and the campaign against the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Some of the Nigerian legislators were curious about the inner workings of a more established democratic system and how they could adapt these lessons. However, while they voiced many of the right platitudes, the Nigerian lawmakers did not appear well-versed on key public policy issues; they seemed more interested in safeguarding their powers and privileges than in improving the performance of their Chambers. END SUMMARY.

**¶2.** (C) Senate President Anyim Pius Anyim and Deputy House Speaker Prince Chibodom Nwuche welcomed Senators Daschle (D-SD), Reid (D-NV), Nighthorse-Campbell (R-CO) and Bingaman (D-NM) to the Senate Chambers during the Codel's visit on August 31. Ambassador Jeter, Codel staff members and other Embassy and USAID staff were also in attendance. Opening the session, Anyim welcomed the Codel, highlighting the improvement in US-Nigerian relations over recent years. Daschle commented that making Nigeria the final stop on the trip was appropriate, given its importance, both regionally and internationally. The Codel then toured the Senate's new information center (a NDI project) and the Senate Chambers before returning to Anyim's office for a closed session to allow for an exchange of ideas among the attendees.

**¶3.** (C) Senator Reid questioned Anyim about the impeachment threat against President Obasanjo. Anyim flippantly contended that the stand-off was "merely democracy at work and no reason for alarm." He said the Senate was responsible to the people of Nigeria and that "the basic tenets of democracy must be allowed to develop and function." He suggested that "electoral issues" were at the core of the disagreement between the two branches but did not elaborate what those issues were. The Deputy Speaker threw in that "parliaments throughout Africa are under assault." He said he had been warning the Presidency and anyone else who cared to listen about the necessity of respecting the Constitution and the importance of rule of law for the past two years, and believed that other improvements would follow from these two foundations.

**¶4.** (C) When Senator Campbell asked about trade between the U.S. and Nigeria, Anyim replied that the security of Nigeria was more important. He worried that the recent State Department travel warning on Nigeria was "counterproductive to trade." Nevertheless, he expressed his support for diversifying Nigeria's economy and lessening reliance on the oil sector, commenting vaguely that Nigeria has to "empower the people to expand trade." He agreed the fundamental program envisioned in NEPAD was sound, but without good governance, NEPAD would fail. Daschle seconded Anyim's sentiment, commenting that rule of law, free enterprise and democracy were all keys to guaranteeing international support for NEPAD. Daschle told the Nigerian lawmakers the USG was committed to increasing trade with Africa, as evidenced by AGOA. The Deputy Speaker advised the Senators that Nigeria is aware of the importance of transparent governance and commented that "what is good for Africa is good for the West."

**¶5.** (C) Senator Bingaman asked about Nigeria's plans for developing its natural gas sector and curbing gas flaring. Anyim mentioned that a natural gas and anti-flaring bill was currently before the Assembly; without providing specifics, he said there had been "progress on it." Anyim noted the growing worldwide consciousness of environmental issues and said that Nigeria was no exception to the trend. The Deputy Speaker erroneously commented that AGIP was the only company working to curtail flaring. "The U.S. companies are not pushing for a solution," he averred. He offered that the pending legislation would require new

exploration to re-inject the gas at the wellhead in order to capture more crude oil while eliminating the flaring. (Comment: The Deputy Speaker was wrong about the American companies. He probably did not care about the veracity of his statement -- because he likely said it for effect. Later that day, Senator Bingaman met with American oil company executives who summarized for him their plans to end gas flaring. They also told him that there would not be any gas flaring at any of their newly developed wells (reftel). End Comment)

16. (C) Anyim asked the CODEL how the Nigerian Legislature should deal with a President who refused to spend funds as budgeted by Legislators. Daschle responded, "Welcome to democracy." He reminded the legislators of the crisis that shut down the USG several years ago and mentioned President Bush's refusal to spend \$5.5 billion recently budgeted by Congress. He pointed out that the two most contentious issues for a democracy were budgets and war. Advising the Nigerian legislators to negotiate with the President rather than fight him, Daschle stressed that "the institutions are more important than the little fights." Nighthorse-Campbell added that the real authority is with the people and "when they call you should listen."

17. (C) The Nigerians asked about USG support for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs, commenting that the U.S. had not provided adequate funding in this area. Daschle said that the USG recognizes its responsibility, expressing his opinion that the \$500 million in recent U.S. budgets was still insufficient and that support for expanding these programs was growing in the U.S. Senate.

18. (C) COMMENT: The atmosphere during the meeting was collegial. The Nigerians appeared eager to hear Codel Daschle's experiences in reconciling the competing interests of the Executive and Legislative branches. While this interest indicates some Nigerian politicians' efforts to chart a course in Nigeria's new democratic environment, the focus and tone of the Nigerians' questions show that, for now, political bickering over the balance of power between the Presidency and the National Assembly remained the preferred course of action.

ANDREWS